

KOPPLIN & KUEBLER

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An epidemic sweeping the club world.....

"NOT ON MY WATCHITIS!"

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Symptoms to be looking for----

"We're not going to raise dues during MY presidential term!"

"There is no way we're going to budget for anything but a breakeven result, even if we have to FORCE our revenue projections! You'll just have to find a way to make it happen!"

"There is no way that we're going to take on changing our antiquated bylaws right now; heck, the members don't trust us now, they certainly won't trust that we don't have some specific motive behind the improvements!"

"We're just not going to assess our members for this project; we'll just have to find a way to cover our debt service from this project through cuts to expenses!"

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Look, its not easy to serve on a volunteer club board these days---a typically thankless job that often causes you to alienate friends, spend a lot of your free time in meetings, and so on---BUT, it does come with a significant responsibility to *do the right thing on behalf of the club!*

I'm certainly not suggesting that the 'fat and happy' days of not too many years ago when many clubs had waiting lists, ever-increasing entrance fees and dues, major capital spending projects, and the like should continue without regard to cost and membership input. However, I also know that the good news of this economic recession is that many clubs have clearly become appropriate efficient and effective in their delivery of service, programs and facilities.

At the same time, I've still yet to find that club that has 'cut its way to prosperity', or is improving its price/value relationship to its members when it's board is filled with folks infected with, '*not on my watchitis!*'

Heck, it's REALLY easy to put off tough decisions for next year's board to deal with...or even several years' boards down the road. Is that, however, even close to 'doing the right thing'? Who wants to pay for any of those basic infrastructure things (air handlers, irrigation systems, plumbing improvements, etc.), and why does the staff need an increase this year, or even next year? They should be happy just to have a job, right?

Hey, I don't like spending money if I can find a way not to, or making decisions that I know may not be supported by everyone, but far too many club board members show symptoms of this disease, and often pass those 'germs' along to their counterparts and successors! I was just at another club where I heard that one of those members running for the board was simply running to 'cut dues'. When I asked him what he'd cut and why, he didn't know because he had not seen the detailed budget, he *JUST KNEW THAT THE DUES WERE TOO HIGH!*

So, here was someone who didn't know anything except that he didn't want to pay more...even if that meant deferring necessary maintenance, cutting well-regarded programs or services, reducing hours of operation, and so forth. In this case, doing so will likely cause the vast majority of members at that club who DO want a nice club and are WILLING to pay for it (with reasonable increases to dues or even an occasional assessment) to become disenchanted and disappointed.

Many of these clubs where the 'not on my watchitis' disease has taken a foothold are also ones where member surveys, town hall meetings, GM/COO focus group sessions and other clear opportunities for member engagement just don't take place, or aren't even on anyone's radar. There has been little or no effort to try and engage the members and to 'level' with them as to why costs are what they are, to ask what members what they are truly interested in and value at the club, or to simply educate them and the staff as to what the club's goals and mission is!

So, the disease goes unchecked and often starts to escalate.

In many instances, this disease can go undetected or more likely, undiagnosed for a year or two, and then reality hits, usually resulting in a full on epidemic! Those deferred or self-serving decisions from prior boards finally catch up with the current board that is then saddled with REALLY tough decisions or 'catch up' calls, which often just prolong the epidemic.

How to prevent '*not on my watchitis*'?

Like other diseases, preventative medicine or efforts are often best. In this disease, there are ALWAYS symptoms that can be observed 'treated' before it turns into a full-blown disease.

The best place is to identify and treat it at the membership vetting stage (where many clubs have simply gone to a 'warm body with a check book' mentality). If a prospective new member doesn't 'get' or buy into the club's culture, he or she may try to change it to fit his or her culture, which may not be the culture of the existing membership. (Note: this assumes that the club has already identified and can articulate its culture and values!)

Secondly, it might be observed and treated at the committee member stage. That's where many of the first signs are visible---doesn't play well with others, filibusters until getting his way, or simply doesn't lay off an issue until she wears everyone else down and they give in. This 'glimpse' into a behavioral pattern needs to be addressed or it will likely cause the disease to grow.

Finally, if it's missed at the committee stage, the last chance to catch and treat it is during the nominating process. If those above noted signs have been observed, but no treatment action has been taken, *the nominating process is where it can and should be administered its full strength antidote*. Anyone with signs of the disease simply shouldn't be allowed to be placed on the ballot for nomination and election to the board. Period. Done. Disease in check. Crisis averted.

Poor or clearly self-serving behavior can't be rewarded by allowing those folks to move on to board service! Not democratic you say? If someone wants to run, shouldn't they be allowed to do so? Sorry, no one said it has to be a democratic arrangement when we're running a multi-million dollar business! We need to be thinking first and foremost about the best interests of our majority stakeholders---members and staff.

Many of you have seen this same disease spreading through our national political scene over the past several years. Several more of you have likely commented on what a shame it is that our national leaders can't seem to put aside self-serving or petty issues and simply can't 'do the right thing' for our nation. Some have suggested that there seems to be an infection that turns into a disease once elected to a national office. On a much, much smaller, but oftentimes more personally impacting way, the political scene in club boardroom is sometimes ground zero for these outbreaks as well.

There is, however, a way to inoculate the masses before the epidemic takes hold!

1. Treating it at the membership vetting stage! Ensure that you can clearly articulate your club's culture and your expectations of a new member. Especially defining what constitutes acceptable behavior.
2. Treating it at the committee member stage. If the symptoms haven't shown themselves until committee service time, make sure that there is an effective system and process in place that articulates the roles and responsibilities one has as a committee member. Then, when behavior is unacceptable or otherwise inappropriate, DEAL with it! Don't look the other way. And, most importantly...
3. Don't reward poor behavior or self-serving motivations by allowing such individuals to be nominated for board service! Sure, it's easier said than done, but too many clubs simply don't try. Nominating committees often roll over and don't fight the hard fight, simply opting to allow those boorish, self-absorbed individuals the larger platform of board service.

Stopping the epidemic and getting inoculated starts with one person at a time.....

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